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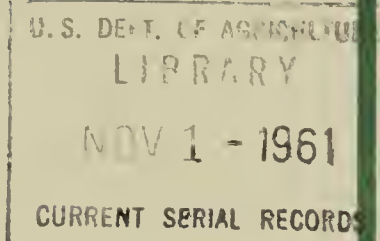
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TECHNICAL NOTES

LAKE STATES FOREST EXPERIMENT STATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE · · FOREST SERVICE

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DOWNWARD TREND OF WOODLAND GRAZING IN SOUTHERN MICHIGAN

The southernmost 37 counties of Michigan account for an important segment of the state's timber product output. For instance, in recent years this area has produced about 20 percent of the value of all rough products cut from Michigan's forest land--despite the fact that the southern Michigan forests represent only 13 percent of the state's commercial forest area. Notwithstanding their contribution, these forests are not producing at full capacity.

One factor which has tended to reduce the productivity of southern Michigan's forest resource is grazing by livestock. Not only does grazing hinder stand regeneration, it leads to quality losses in mature timber. As late as 1945, one-third of the forest land in southern Michigan was being used for pasture. Since that time, however, the acreage of grazed woodlots has steadily decreased (fig. 1) to where, in 1960, less than one-fifth of southern Michigan's 2.6 million acres of forest land was pastured. This represents a reduction of 43 percent.

The decrease in acreage of grazed woodland since World War II has not resulted from a decrease in total farm woodland. The latter acreage figure has remained virtually static during this period.^{1/} Rather, the reduction in pastured forest land reflects the fact that many southern Michigan farmers have shifted from the production of dairy products to other agricultural commodities. Figure 1 depicts the close correlation between the number of milk cows being maintained and the acreage of grazed woodland in southern Michigan.

With the proximity to expanding population centers, it may seem strange that southern Michigan farms are producing less dairy products. One probable reason for this paradoxical situation is that high factory wages have attracted potential farm laborers to the cities. Another is that more farmers are working part-time off the farm. These two

^{1/} Since total agricultural land in southern Michigan has decreased 6 percent since 1945, one would expect the acreage of farm woodland to drop at least as much. One plausible reason for this not being the case stems from the fact that the acreage of "farm woodland" has always been determined from direct questioning of the farmer. Portions of farms now identified by the owners as woodland may not have been so classed in 1945.

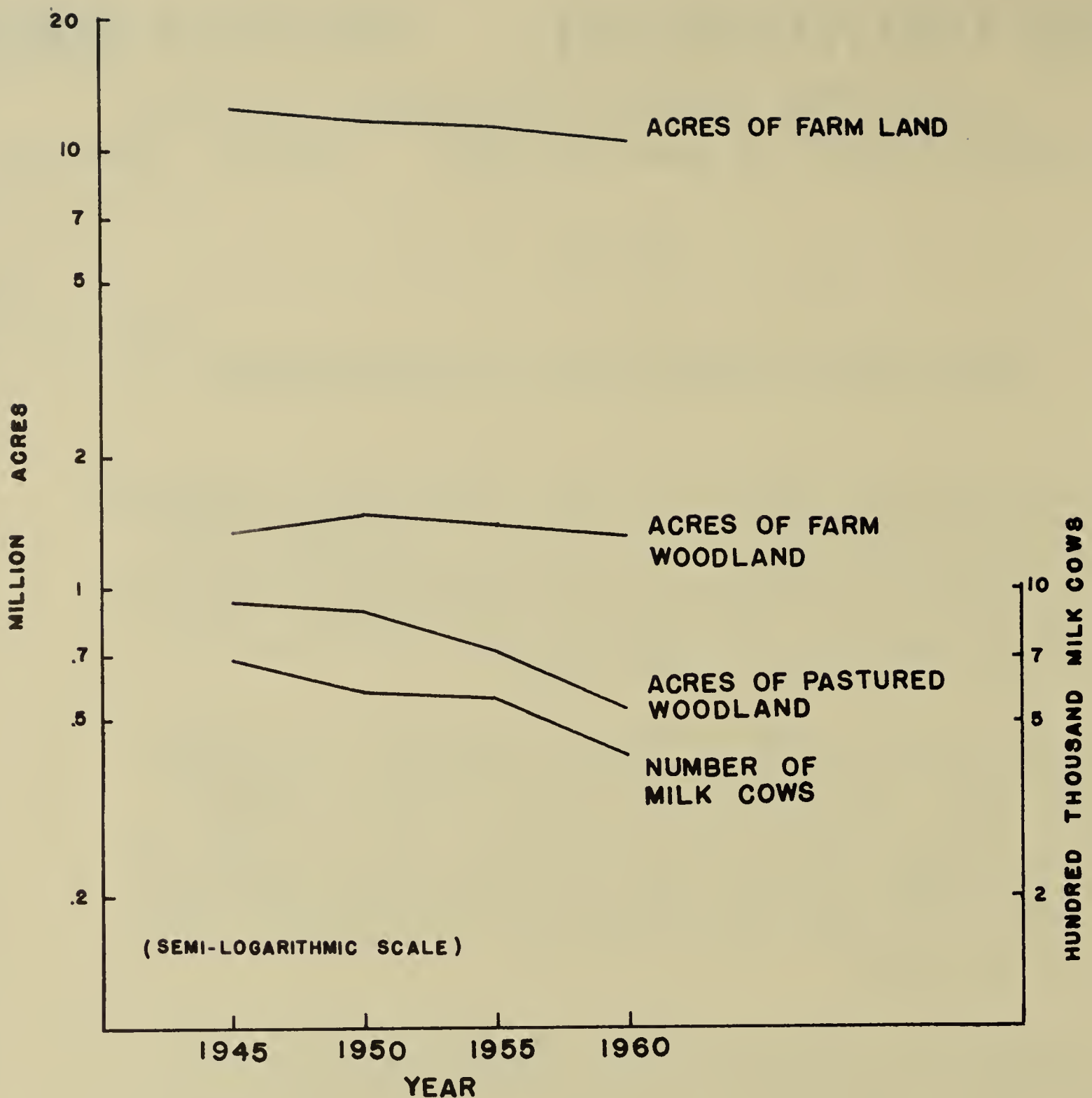


Figure 1.--Changes in dairy herd size in relation to agricultural land use patterns in southern Michigan.
(Source: Census of Agriculture)

factors may have caused southern Michigan farmers to reduce the number of those kinds of livestock requiring considerable labor inputs.^{2/} Though the forest area grazed may cease to diminish in the future, the reduction during the last 15 years should help improve timber-growing conditions in southern Michigan's woodlands.

^{2/} Cf., Wright, Karl T. Changes in food-grain production and livestock numbers in Michigan, Mich. Agr. Expt. Sta. Special Bul. 407, 1956, p. 30.